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A

SERMON

Preached at the

A S S I Z E S

Held for the County-Palatine of

C H E S T E R

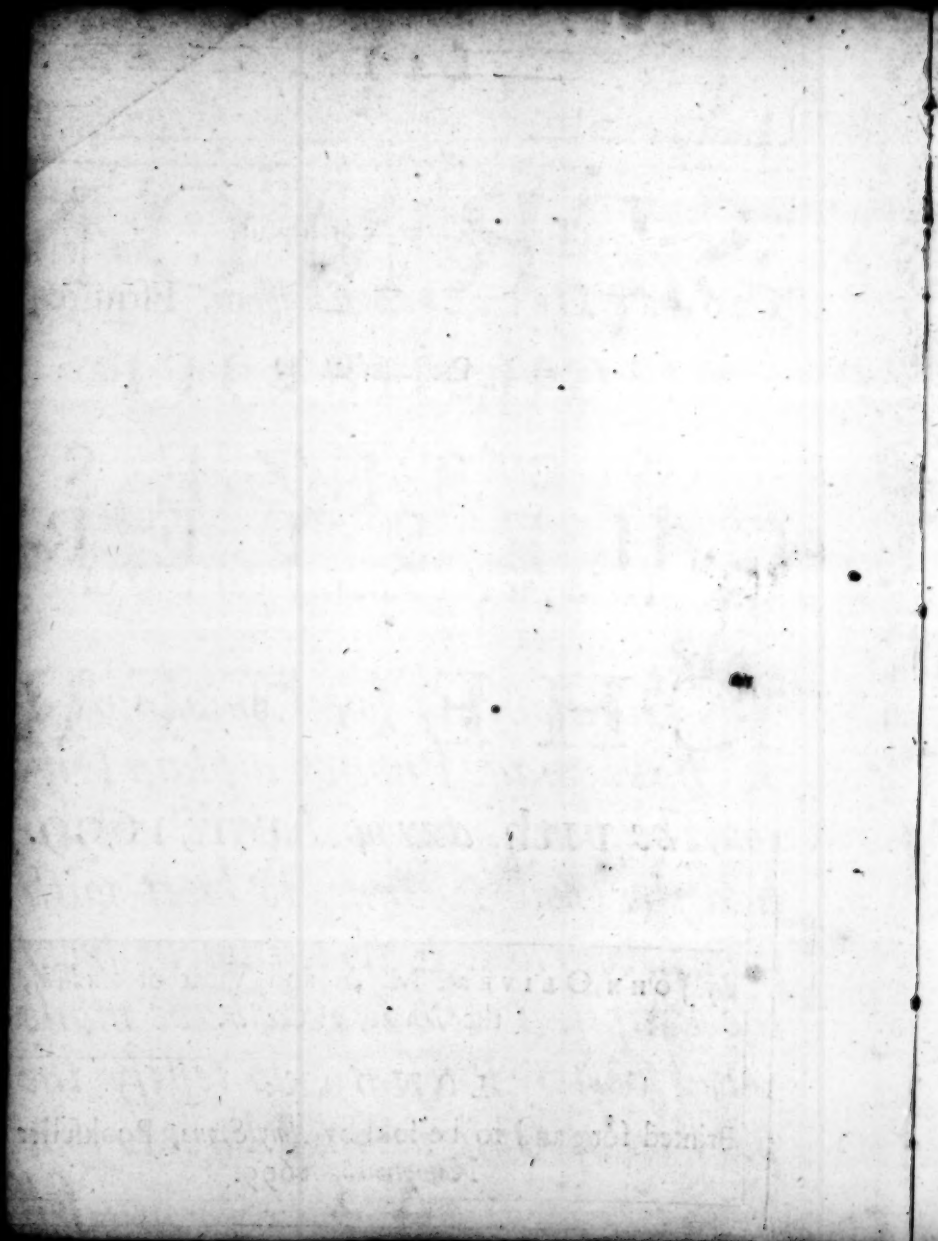
The 11th. day of April, 1699.

By JOHN OLIVER, M. A. and Vicar of *Audlem*,
the County of *Chester*.

L O N D O N :

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To the Right Worshipful
 THOMAS DELVES of *Eardsham*, Esquire;
 HIGH-SHERIFF
 Of the County of
 C H E S T E R.

SIR,
 I *N Obedience to your Commands, I have made Publick a plain Discourse, upon a common Subject, which had the good Fortune to meet with some favourable Entertainment from the Pulpit. I wish I could have made you a better Present, to testify the particular Obligations I have to your*
 A 2 *self*

Self, and your worthy Family: However, such as it is, I humbly offer it in acknowledgment of all past Favours.

That God Almighty would bless you with a numerous Offspring, such as may derive your Name, and especially the Noble Qualities of your House, to many succeeding Generations; is the Constant Prayer of

Sir,

Your most humble, and
most obliged Servant,

JOHN OLIVER.

P R O V. X. 9

He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely.

IN this short Sentence, *Solomon* commends to our Practice a Noble and an Excellent Rule for the Government of our Lives; that of Integrity, or Upright Walking; a Rule of absolute necessity, and general use through all the parts of our Conversation; as that which will direct us in every Action we undertake, conduct us through all the Relations we are engag'd in, and enable us to steer our Course aright, through that great variety of Events and Contingencies that fall out in the world. And the Observation hereof, that wise Prince enforces, from an Argument that seldom fails of gaining upon our Consent, *viz.* the mighty Advantages that will attend this Method: he assures us, that by a steady Perseverance in our Duty, in spite of all Temptations to the contrary, we shall render our lives easie and comfortable, secure all our most valuable Concerns, and pass our whole time in a happy Calm and Tranquillity; whilst the Politicians of the World, those who think

think to establish their Repose and their Fortune by Maxims of a different Nature, by evil Arts and unlawful Practices, by the crooked ways of Subtilty and Intrigue, by mean Flatteries and unworthy Compliances, will find themselves at last fatally disappointed of their aims, and be forc'd to sit down under all the Melancholick Resentments of their own ill Conduct: for so it follows in the Close of this Verse; *But he that perverteth his ways shall be known.*

In my Discourse upon these Words, I shall endeavour these Two Things.

- I. *First*, To give some account of the Duty in my Text; and that by Representing to you the Character of the Just and Upright Man: *He that walketh uprightly.*
 - II. *Secondly*, To shew you the Advantage of this Principle.
- I. I begin with the First of these, the Character of the upright man. In general, he is one that takes care to conform all his Actions to their proper Rule, and directs 'em to right Ends; He considers what Obligations he lyes under from the Laws of God and Man, from the Dictates of right Reason and a well-inform'd Conscience; and to these Measures he resigns the absolute disposal of his whole Deportment in the World. This is the way he chooses to walk in, and he proceeds in it with such a resolution and firmness of

of Mind, as is not to be shaken on the one hand by the Charms and Allurements of the most glorious Fortune, nor on the other with the threatning Prospect of the worst Calamities : the consideration of what he shall gain by departing from his Rule, or what he shall lose by adhering to it, makes no Impression upon him, but he is unalterably fixt and obstinate to his Principle, and takes it for the Companion of his whole Life, let the Consequence of it be what it will : And this Rule is a guide to him in every Action, in all his Relations, and amidst the manifold Changes and Accidents of his Life.

Whatsoever he undertakes, the grand Question with him is not, Whether that Action will make him Great and Powerful in the World, whether it will minister to his Pleasure, or gratifie his Ambition, or advance his Fortune ? no, but Is it fit or necessary to be done ? Is it warranted by Law ? Will it abide the Test of Conscience ? Can it be own'd with Credit in the face of this World ? and may it be safely ventur'd to the Account of that great and terrible day of universal Recompence ? Pride and Ambition, Interest and Design, Luxury and Pleasure, are none of his Council ; these are never admitted to mingle in the Debate, nor form the Resolution, nor determine the Practice ; but what the Law commands, and Religion binds him to, what Honor
and.

and Conscience require of him, that he readily engages in, and never troubles his thoughts about the Event; since that is not in his Power as his Actions are: and therefore as he thinks himself oblig'd to look after the one, he knows he ought to leave the other where it belongs, to the Discretion of an All-wise Providence. And as he is thus concern'd for the Matter of his Actions, he is no less solicitous about the Intention; and takes care that his Heart be Upright in that Point also. He will not lose the Glory, nor the Reward of Well-doing, by suffering any ill Designs or unworthy Ends to mix in the performance, and therefore whatever he does, proceeds upon good Grounds, and just Motives: His Prayers are never offer'd up without a hearty Zeal and a pure Devotion, his Alms are always the result of a real Tenderness and Compassion, and every Fast he undertakes is a Religious Audit, a season of strict Reckoning and Account, in order to perfect his Repentance, and even Matters betwixt God and his own Soul: much less can he satisfy himself with Forms and Appearances of Vertue without the Thing; he is not willing to seem a better Man than he is, and is so far remov'd from all degrees of Vanity and Affectation, that he is scarce content to be thought so good. Hypocrisie and Intrigue, the leading Principles of too great a part of Mankind, have no share in

his Management, and therefore his Face is ever the true Index of his Mind; his Thoughts and Expressions are not at War with each other, and all his Vows and Promises, his Oaths and Protestations are so many sacred and inviolable Tyes upon his Honor and his Conscience. In a word, his whole Conversation has an Openness and Freedom in it, like that of the Air he breaths in, and is as clear as the Light at Noon-day, without the least Artifice of Disguise or Reserve.

Whatsoever Relations he is engaged in, this same Principle bears him constant Company; if Providence have raised him above the common level of Men, and entrusted him with the Administration of Publick Justice, the Law is his Rule, and Justice is his End; and the great Example he copies from in all his Proceedings, is that Sovereign Justice above, from which he derives his Power, and to which the last Account must be given of its Execution: like that he renders to all under his Charge according to their Doings, without the least Partiality or Respect of Persons; he weighs the Merits of the Cause without throwing in the Circumstances of the Party to unsettle the Balance, so that neither the Weight of Greatness presses down the Scale, nor the Lightness of Poverty kicks it up; but every Action receives such

2.

a Sentence as the Law has provided, and meets with a Reward or a Punishment suitable to its own Merit. If the Cure of Souls become his Province, the Importance of his Charge, and the Consideration of a vast Eternity in Happiness or Torments unspeakable, the infallible Recompence of Vertue and Vice, inspire all his Ministerial Applications with an extraordinary Vigor, and set him to the Discharge of every Branch of the sacred Office with all imaginable Diligence; and because the World is not easily reconciled to Principles that contradict the natural Lusts and Passions of Men, and because most Men are willing to excuse themselves by every Pretence, from what they are loth to practise, he endeavours to convince his People both of the Truth of his Doctrine, and Practicableness of Religion, by his own Example, and teaches others the Value they ought to set upon their precious and immortal Souls, by the particular Care he has of his own. If Subjection be his Lot, he is very well satisfy'd with his Station, as knowing how much easier it is to obey than to govern, to receive than to give Laws; he is very sensible of the great Burden that Authority lies under, how vast a Load of Care and Business devolves upon him who has the Charge of a Multitude, and stands oblig'd to provide for the Rights and Interests of every particular Member of

(II)

of it, and therefore he thinks it a Shame to add more Weight, by a perverse and refractory Carriage, but resolves to contribute all he can to the ease of his Superiors, by a cheerful Obedience to their Commands, and to the Maintenance and Support of them also by as cheerful a Liberality.

3.
Last of all, as to the various Events and Accidents of his Life: no Change of outward Circumstances creates the least Alteration in him; the most elevated Condition can't make him forget the Obligations he has to common Justice and Humanity, and that Power that furnishes him with a Thousand Opportunities of doing good, is never misemploy'd to Acts of Injustice and Oppression. Pride and Haughtiness and Contempt of others are Qualities he is a perfect Stranger to, and however Providence may have remov'd him to some considerable Distance from his Inferiors, he remembers withal, that Distance has not broke the Relation he bears to them as a Man and a Christian, nor depriv'd them of that Right they have upon both Accounts to his Charity and Protection: On the other hand, Misfortune can't so far debase his Spirit, but that he still remains the Master of his Honour, and his Vertue; he is ne-

ver brought so low as to stoop to any base unlawful Means for the Recovery of his Fortune, nor can he ever think it reasonable to redeem his Interest at the Price of his Conscience; much less does he harbour any murmuring Thoughts of that Supreme Power to whom belongs the Disposal of humane Affairs by unquestionable Right: and who can at pleasure shift the Scene, and make the greatest Prince change Circumstances with the meanest Slave: in his lowest Declension he discovers a Brightness equal to that of his greatest Height, and lets all Men see, that his Vertue is not like Quicksilver in a Glass, subject to all the Alterations of the Weather, but is the fixt Persuasion of his Mind, and the settled Choice and Resolution of his Soul.

This is the Upright Man, view him all over and you'll find him exactly of a piece; Justice and Righteousness are the ruling Qualities of his Conversation, Interest, and Design, and Subtilty have no place in him, and whatsoever Judgment the World makes of him, he is abundantly satisfi'd with a sense of Well-doing, and finds it at last the best Policy too.

Which

Which brings me to the
 Second thing : The Advantage of this great
 Principle : And that will appear upon many
 Accounts.

- I. With Respect to God.
- II. To the World.
- III. To a Mans own Conscience.
- IV. To the Judgment of the great Day.

With Respect to God : An upright Carriage 1.
 will most certainly commend us to the Care of
 Divine Providence, and engage that on our sides;
 and under this Protection we may well defy all
 the Hazards and Misfortunes of this World : to
 which purposes we have these Assurances of Holy
 Writ: *The righteous Lord loveth righteousness, his* Psalms, 11,
countenance doth behold the upright. The Lord 37, 18.
knoweth the days of the upright, and their inheritance
shall be for ever. The upright shall dwell in the land, Prov. 2. 21. &
and the perfect shall remain in it; but the wicked shall
be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall
be rooted out of it. Now what are all these, but so
 many expresse Declarations of Heaven to assure
 Good Men of Protection and Assistance in their
 ways; whilst the Wicked are for saken of God,
 and

and left to reap the fruit of their own Evil Counsels. And indeed it must needs be so, for sure they that commit themselves, and all their Affairs to an Almighty Power and Wisdom, and rest wholly upon that in the Discharge of their Duty ; that are not to be frightened from it by any Terrors or Sufferings on the one hand, nor seduc'd out of it by the offers of any Worldly Interest and Advantage on the other ; they that dare be Honest, and trust God with the Event, these sure have a better Title to his Promises, and a greater Interest in his Care than other Men, and whatsoever Calamities shall happen in the World, they may reasonably hope for his Support and Assistance : Truth, and Righteousness, and Sincerity are Qualities that can't fail of endearing us to God as well as Man, these are some of the brightest Resemblances of his own Divinity, and can't choose but engage his Affection in what part soever of his Workmanship they are found ; an humble Resignation of our selves and all our Concerns to him, without the least Dependance on our own Strength or Policy, this will enter us into his immediate and particular Care, and prove the nearest and most infallible Way to our Happiness and Security : for what should make him afraid, that has Omnipotence for his Guard, or what can
 he

he want that lives under the Provision of infinite Goodness? Such as these in the Royal Prophets Expression, need not *fear the terrors by night, nor* pf. 91. 5, 6, *the arrow that flyeth by day, nor the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor the destruction that wasteth at noon-day: a thousand shall fall on one hand, and ten thousand on the other, but it shall not come nigh them;* nay tho the World should fly asunder, and fall into its final Confusion, they need not start at its Dissolution; their own Integrity and Heavens Care is their Shield and Buckler, and let what will happen, it shall certainly turn to their Account. But can the Wicked and the Fraudulent, the Subtle and the Projecting Person promise, *the* thems like Security? I doubt not such as resolve to establish their Fortunes by any Means, that contrive to make themselves great and considerable at any Price; that lay the Scene of their own Advancement by the Rules of Worldly Policy, and never trouble their Heads with Notions of Right or Wrong, of Heaven or Hell; these sure can form no Title to the Divine Promise, nor challenge any Interest in the Divine Care; they have nothing to trust to but themselves, and are commonly the most fatally mistaken in their own Projects: such men do in Effect renounce the Protection of the Almighty, and defy his Providence; and con-

consequently it is but Just with God to lay aside all care of 'em, to turn their Councils into Folly, and to bring all their Glorious Contrivances to nothing.

2. With Respect to the World. Many are the Advantages of Righteousness, not to mention at present the just Honor and Reputation which attends this Vertue, even in the Opinion of those who are not willing to practice it ; nor the general Obligation it lays upon all we have the opportunity to converse with. I shall instance in one particular that relates to the Occasion before us, which is this: This Principle is sure to commend us to the Protection of the Laws, and will secure the Favour and Countenance of Authority :

13. 3. 4. St. Paul tells us, that *Rulers are not a terror to good works but to the evil*; that's the great End and Design of their Institution, and where they Act contrary, they go beyond their Commission, and violate the Trust repos'd in 'em; and then adds, *Wilt thou not be afraid of the powers, do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same; for he is the minister of God to thee for good: But if thou do that which is evil be afraid, for he beareth not the sword in vain: and elsewhere he assures us, that the law is not made for the righteous, but for the lawless*

Tim. 1. 9.

less and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers, and murderers of mothers, for men-slayers, and the like : where Men are so hardy as to break through all the Bounds the Laws of God and Man have prescribed ; where they have the Impudence to attempt the Rights of Majesty, and will venture to stamp their Sovereign's Image upon their own base Metal, where they are not satisfy'd with their Legal Properties, but will be invading those of their Neighbours : when they are not content to refer their private Injuries to the Decision of the Civil Magistrate, but will be Judges in their own Cause, and hang and draw by their own Sentence : It can't be expected, but that the Justice of a Nation will be rous'd by such bold and desperate Impieties, and be oblig'd in Honor to itself, and for the Preservation of publick Peace, to leave the Offenders to the utmost Severities of the Laws: Without some Examples in these Cases, Government would naturally dissolve, and all its Bonds fly asunder, and Mankind must return to that Condition which some have fancied to be its Primitive State, a Company of Bears and Wolves worrying and devouring one another : But good Men run no Hazards under a Government sensible of its Honor, and exact in

its Administrations; their Lives, ~~van~~ Fortunes, their Liberties are all at repose, and whosoever attempts any of these, does it at his Peril: such Men are as secure in their several Interests as the Strength of a Nation can render them, and the same Force that maintains the whole Body in Peace and Order, descendsto the Preservation of every particular Member of it; and so long as they keep close to their Rule, and persist in exact Obediēce to the Laws, they have no reason to suspect either the Anger of their Superiors, or the Violence of their Fellow-Subjects. In general, to the Just and Upright, Laws are a constant Guard and Protection, and they turn the edge only upon Evil-Doers, whose Subtilty may perchance evade their Force a while, but it seldom secures them long, and when once discover'd, does certainly give them up a Sacrifice to revengeful Justice.

3. But, howsoever it may fare with the Righteous, as to their outward Circumstances in the World, whatsoever Misfortunes Heaven may suffer them to fall under for the Tryal and Improvement of their Vertue, yet have they an inward Comfort greater than all their Afflictions, the happy Testimony of their own Consciences, applauding and justifying their Integrity, these will

will speak Peace to them, bear up their drooping Spirits, and give them Courage and Assurance under their greatest Pressures : Let the Weather be as bad as it can be abroad, let the Storm rage never so horribly, Good Men have a safe Harbor in their own breasts, all is quiet and calm within, their Minds are perfectly at ease, undisturb'd by the Disorders of Guilty Thoughts, or the gusts of Tempestuous Passions : A good Conscience is a Blessing of more value than all the other Enjoyments of Life 'tis this that gives Life and Being to all other Satisfactions, and without this they lose their very Essence, and convert into a Load and an Oppression; like Health to the Body, it keeps a Man easy under the meanest Circumstances, and without it he never can be so in the greatest Affluence. And 'tis this Blessing of Life only that is not liable to any outward Accidents, no Change or Revolution of Affairs, no Capricchio's of Fortune, no Malice of Enemies can make the least Impression upon it ; 'tis no more to be forc'd than our Wills and our Choice, as inseparable from Vertue, as Light and Heat from the Body of the Sun ; and so long as the Spring that feeds it be well maintain'd, so long as Men persist in a steady Resolution of living well, these Streams of Pleasures can never be cut off, or

dried up. But the Wicked can't pretend to this Advantage; in the height of their Prosperity Guilt, and Fear, and Anxiety of Mind will make the best Ornaments of Life sit uneasily about them, and Happiness is vainly sought in things without, whilst the Soul and Conscience are disorder'd within; and in their lowest ebb these Men of all others are the most Miserable. When the Arrows of the Almighty are abroad in the Earth, and he visits for the Iniquity of a People; when he lays his hand on Evil-Doers, and presses them sore, what a Condition are they in who have no Retreat to fly to, nothing in all the World to take refuge under? When there is a raging Storm without, and a violent Tempest within; when the Almighty becomes their Enemy, and their own Conscience refuses to be their Friend, but adds to their Miseries by secret Rebukes, and an invisible Sting; when the Guilt of all their past Impieties displays itself before their Thoughts in blackest Colours, and summoneth up their Fears of approaching Vengeance, this is enough to set them at their Wits ends, and make them Wretched to the last Degree. *The spirit of a man will sustain his Infirmary, says the Wise Man, but a wounded Spirit who can bear?* When that which should relieve a Man in Extremity proves
itself

itself the greatest Burden, that Burden must ^{needs} be intolerable.

Lastly, To pass on to the last and greatest Advantage, That which waits for Righteous and Good Men in the Recompence of the great Day. And here give me leave in a few Words to entertain your Thoughts with part of the Proceedings of that solemn Assize; The Time is long since fix'd in the unalterable Decrees of Heaven, and every Day sets us nearer to it, and when it does come, we shall all have a very great and concerning share in it. That Day will no sooner appear, but it will open to our View the most astonishing Prospect, the Glory and Majesty of the great Judge, the vast and numerous Assembly that will stand before him, the Troops of Good and Evil Angels in their different Posts attending the Execution of his Sentence, the rais'd Hopes and Expectations of Good Men, and the presaging Horrors of the Wicked, will strike us with strange and unusual Apprehensions: then all things will appear in a different Form to what they now undergo, then Vertue and Piety (once the Scorn of Fools, and Envy of Devils, despis'd, run down, and persecuted by an ungrateful World, to the utmost stretch of its Wit and Malice,) will be brought forth.

forth in Triumph, and crown'd with Rewards infinitely great, and such as our present Conceptions cannot form any tolerable Notion of. Then Innocence and Sincerity, howsoever they were overcast in this Life, will look Bright and Clear to all the World, and Godliness will be found Gain, and Honesty the best Policy. Then Religion will be all one with Wisdom, the very Character the Wise Man now gives it, and Duty and Interest will be but different Names for the same thing; and no Persons will appear to have consider'd their Advantage so much, as they that expos'd every thing that was dear to them on this side Heaven, their Honor, their Estates, and even Life itself, for the sake of a Good Conscience, and a Glorious Eternity. Then will all the Works of Darkness be brought to Light, and expos'd in their proper Colours to the view of Men and Angels; Hypocrisie will no longer walk in Disguise, but be stript of its artificial Dress, and presented to that vast Assembly in its native Uglinefs and Deformity: then Atheism will be found stark Madness, and Profaneness the most desperate Folly, and the Wise Men of the World, as they are now counted, will appear the most stupid Wretches, and they that could part with their Honour, and their Conscience in exchange for a little parcel of Earth,

Earth, for an Aiery Title, for a few Moments of Sensual Satisfaction, will be found to have made the saddest Bargain, and to have pawn'd away their Souls for a Trifle; and all Sinners will stand amaz'd how they came to be thus over-reach'd by the Delusions of Satan, and so far lost to all Sense and Reason, as to give up what was infinitely Valuable, their Innocence, their God, and Heaven and Eternity, for just nothing. Most certainly, all things will in a little time, put on another Face than what they now carry, and our Apprehensions of them will be quickly alter'd from what they are at present. The Scene will undoubtedly change before it be long, and rectify abundance of Mistakes we now lie under; the things which are now Articles of our Faith, will in time become the Objects of Sense, and the Hopes and Fears of good and bad Men, will one day terminate in a joyful or a miserable Experience, and those things which are now reckoned for Cheats of Government by our new Refiners of the Age, the Notions of Good and Evil, Heaven and Hell, will be found by them Sad and Important Truths, the Genuine Impressions of Nature, and the Results of sober and wise Reasoning. Then will all the dark Proceedings of Providence be unfolded, then the Sufferings and Per-

Persecutions that good Men lay under, for the Trial of their Constancy, and Increase of their Vertue will prove the happy Engines that have rais'd them up to an Eternal Weight of Glory : and the Ingratitude and Impenitence of Sinners under the various Methods of Divine Clemency, will sink their Souls and Bodies into Torments intolerable, and yet such as must be endured for ever.

Thus far I have pursued the Advantages of this Vertue in my Text, and shewn you how great Gainers we shall be by conforming our Practice to it : The Favour of God, the Approbation of our own Consciences, the Protection of Humane Laws ; not to mention the good Opinion of all Wise Men, and the various Offices of Kindness and Humanity which this Principle binds all Men to return to us, are the present Rewards of it, besides what we may justly promise our selves in Reversion, the unconceivable Delights of a glorious Eternity. In a word, the Interests of both Worlds are concern'd in it, and it is not possible for us to miscarry either here or hereafter, so long as we hold close to this Rule.

May these Considerations then sink deep into our Hearts, and engage us to act accordingly. Whatsoever Station the Divine Providence shall cast us into, let us take Care that our Consciences be rightly inform'd in their Duty, and when they are so, resolve that no Inducement whatsoever shall make us go counter to their Orders, or violate their Commands. Let us endeavour to stand so firm, that neither the greatest Dangers may fright us from our Duty, nor the highest Flatteries of Fortune seduce us from it, nor any Temptation whatsoever triumph over our Honor and our Integrity; and if we thus steer our Course, we shall make Sure of a safe Passage, at least through this World, howsoever our Vessel may be beaten with the Storms and Tempests of it; and shall in the end arrive at a happy Shore, where Pious Souls are in full Possession of all they can desire, there to reap the Everlasting Fruits of Righteousness and Well-doing.

Which God grant, &c.

F I N I S.